

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03

SS-20 USIA-15 SAM-01 NEA-11 IO-14 OMB-01 DRC-01 /149 W

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R 061510Z FEB 74

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4403

INFO USINT ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, TS, LY

SUBJECT: FIRST DAY OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATE ON
TUNISIAN-LIBYAN MERGER SUPPORTS NOUIRA POSITION

REF: TUNIS 643

1. SUMMARY: FIRST DAY OF DEBATE ON PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT INTRODUCED BY NOUIRA ON FEB 1 RESULTED IN ALMOST UNANIMOUS SUPPORT FOR NOUIRA DECLARATION AND GOT/PARTY POSITION ADOPTED ON JAN 15. OF TWENTY-ONE DEPUTIES WHO SPOKE, NONE VOICED OPPOSITION TO PRESENT GRADUALISTIC APPROACH TOWARD MERGER, INCLUDING AMENDMENT PROPOSAL. MOST SIGNIFICANT SPEECHES WERE BY TWO MEMBERS OF LIBERAL FACTION OF PSD, WHO GAVE NUANCED REPLY TO NOUIRA'S FEB 1 CALL FOR NATIONAL UNITY, INDICATING THEY READY TO COOPERATE IF RIGHT CONDITIONS ARE CREATED WITHIN PSD AND GOT. LIBERALS ALSO CRITICIZED ALGERIAN REACTION TO UNION BUT AT SAME TIME EXPRESSED RESERVATIONS REGARDING QADHAFI'S MOTIVES IN PROPOSING UNION. ON WHOLE, NOUIRA MUST BE HIGHLY PLEASED

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WITH DEBATE THUS FAR. DEBATE CONTINUES FEB 6. END SUMMARY.

2. NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATE ON CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM AMENDMENT, WHICH BEGAN FEB 5, GIVEN EXTENSIVE COVERAGE IN LOCAL PRESS. HOWEVER, ONLY INDEPENDENT ASA-SABAH CARRIED FULL TEXT OF ALL STATEMENTS MADE BY DEPUTIES. MOST SIGNIFICANT SPEECHES THUS FAR HAVE BEEN 45-MINUTE PRESENTATION BY KEY LIBERAL SPOKESMAN IN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, FORMER MINISTER AND AMBASSADOR BEJI CAID ESSEBSI, AND STATEMENT BY FORMER MIN YOUTH AND SPORTS AHMED CHTOUROU, ALSO A LIBERAL. WHILE SUPPORTING PRINCIPLE OF UNION BETWEEN TUNISIA AND LIBYA AS STEP IN REALIZATION OF GREATER MAGHREB UNITY AND CITING LIBERAL DECLARATION IN THIS REGARD ISSUED JAN 12, CAID ESSEBSI CAUTIONED THAT VIEWS OF LIBYAN PARTNER SHOULD BE CLEARLY ESTABLISHED. HE ALSO QUESTIONED WHETHER QADHFI SIGNED JERBE PROCLAMATION AS HEAD OF LIBYA OR AS MEMBER OF UNION OF ARAB REPUBLICS, POINTING OUT THAT ARTICLE 14 OF UAR CONSTITUTION GIVES LATTER PREROGATIVE FOR DEFINING FOREIGN POLICY AND CONCLUDING TREATIES. THRUST OF CAID ESSEBSI'S REMARKS WAS THAT TUNISIA IS COMMITTED TO BUILDING GREATER MAGHREB BUT IS NOT NECESSARILY INTERESTED IN BEING PULLED INTO MASHREK. THEREFORE, TUNISIA MUST FIND OUT IF

LIBYA STILL INTENDS CONTINUE ITS MASHREK ASSOCIATION. CAID ESSEBSI SAID THAT IN THIS CONTEXT NEGATIVE ALGERIAN REACTION TO TUNISIAN-LIBYAN MERGER PROPOSAL COULD BE EXPLAINED, BUT TUNISIA SHOULD EXPLAIN TO ALGERIA THAT IT NOT QUESTION OF JUMPING ON MOVING TRAIN SINCE TRAIN IS STILL IN THE STATION. HE QUESTIONED IF ALGERIA INTERESTED IN BUILDING GREATER MAGHREB OR "GREATER ALGERIA". CAID ESSEBSI NOTED THAT IN PAST, PARTY HAD BEEN STRONG FORCE WHICH COULD FACE GREAT CHALLENGES BEHIND WISE LEADERSHIP OF PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA. THIS WAS NOT CASE TODAY AND IT NECESSARY FOR CURRENT POLITICAL MALAISE TO BE DISSIPATED IN ORDER TO FACE HISTORIC CHALLENGE WITH MAXIMUM CHANCE OF SUCCESS. CAID ESSEBSI NOTED APPEAL WHICH NOUIRA HAD LAUNCHED FOR NATIONAL UNITY AND SAID THIS APPEAL SHOULD APPLY TO EVERYONE INCLUDING MEMBERS OF GOVERNMENT.

3. SPEAKING LATER IN DAY, CHTOUROU SUPPORTED JERBA PROCLAMATION BUT EXPRESSED NEED FOR CAUTION IN APPROACHING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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UNITY WITH LIBYA AND DID NOT FORESEE RAPID REALIZATION OF THIS UNITY. HE SAID NUMEROUS QUESTIONS SHOULD BE WORKED OUT IN ADVANCE SUCH AS NATURE OF FUTURE STATE, PLACE OF RELIGION AND ARMY IN THIS STATE AND FUTURE OF CURRENT POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS. CHTOUROU CRITICIZED REACTION OF ALGERIANS, NOTING THAT TUNISIA HAS LONG TRIED TO INTEREST ALGERIA IN MAGHREB COOPERATION BUT HAD ENCOUNTERED RESISTANCE, PARTICULARLY IN DEVELOPING ECONOMIC COOPERATION.

HE SAID IT PREFERABLE HAVE APPROVAL OF MAGHREB COUNTRIES ON UNITY, BUT THESE COUNTRIES SHOULD RESPECT SENTIMENTS OF TUNISIAN PEOPLE AND SHOW RESTRAINT IN THEIR ATTITUDES SO THAT THEY CAN WORK TOGETHER ON THE STEPS TOWARD THIS UNITY. CHTOUROU ALSO ECHOED CAID ESSEBSI'S CALL THAT RIGHT CONDITIONS MUST BE REALIZED WITHIN PARTY IF NATIONAL UNITY TO BE CREATED AND SUGGESTED THAT PSD CENTRAL COMMITTEE BE CONVENED. (THIS BODY HAS NOT MET SINCE OCTOBER 1971.)

4. UGTT LEADER HABIB ACHOUR MADE SPEECH STRONGLY SUPPORTING NOUIRA DECLARATION OF JAN 15. HOWEVER, HE INDIRECTLY CRITICIZED PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA FOR HAVING ARBITRARILY AGREED ON MINISTERIAL ASSIGNMENTS PRIOR TO ANY CONSULTATION. HE ALSO ADDED UGTT IS OPPOSED TO ANY GOVERNMENT WHICH WOULD LEAVE WAY OPEN TO INSTALLATION OF MILITARY TAKEOVER.

5. NOTABLE ABSENTEE FROM ASSEMBLY DEBATE WAS FORMER FONMIN MOHAMED MASMOUDI, WHO DID NOT ATTEND FEB 1 SESSION EITHER.; HE REPORTEDLY HAS BEEN OUT OF COUNTRY SINCE LATE JANUARY AND CURRENTLY RUMORED TO BE IN TRIPOLI. NONE OF MASMOUDI'S KNOWN CLOSE SUPPORTERS ARE MEMBERS OF ASSEMBLY, AND REMAINS TO BE SEEN IF MASMOUDI'S VIEWS ON UNION WILL BE HEARD IN CURRENT DEBATE.

6. COMMENT: SPEECHES THUS FAR HAVE ALL EMPHASIZED SUPPORT FOR UNITY PRINCIPLE BUT HAVE STRESSED THAT PRESENT, GRADUALISTIC GOT APPROACH IS CORRECT ONE TO TAKE. WHILE LIBERAL RESPONSE TO NOUIRA APPEAL FOR NATIONAL UNITY IS QUALIFIED, BELIEVE NOUIRA PROBABLY ENCOURAGED THAT GOOD CHANCE NOW EXISTS TO BRING LIBERALS BACK INTO PSD MAINSTREAM. HOW HE WILL USE THIS OPPORTUNITY REMAINS TO

BE SEEN.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FEDERATION, ECONOMIC COOPERATION, CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS, CENTRAL LEGISLATURE, CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM, SPEECHES, POLITICAL PARTIES, FOREIGN POLICY POSITION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 06 FEB 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: morefirh
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974TUNIS00710
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: n/a
From: TUNIS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740250/aaaabvjw.tel
Line Count: 155
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: TUNIS 643
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: morefirh
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 19 APR 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <19 APR 2002 by elyme>; APPROVED <03 JUN 2002 by morefirh>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: FIRST DAY OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATE ON TUNISIAN-LIBYAN MERGER SUPPORTS NOUIRA POSITION
TAGS: PFOR, TS, LY, AG, PSD, (NOUIRA, HEDI)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005